TC 2126

SOME BACKGROUND MATERIALS ON

GOENAWAN MOHAMAD

indonesian poet, literary critic, journalist, editorialist

Schedule of Public Talks in Auckland

THURSDAY, 29 JUNE 1995, CONFERENCE CENTRE, SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

12:00 – 14:00 "Pembreidelan Tempo: Pengalaman Pribadi"
["The Closure of *Tempo*: A Personal View"]

15:00 – 17:00 Acara Membaca Sajak, Diskusi Terbuka Dunia Sastra Indonesia
[Poetry Reading, Open Discussion of the Indonesian literary scene]

FRIDAY, 30 JUNE, RM. G-14, COMMERCE "A" BUILDING

16:00 – 17:00 "On Being a Writer in Indonesia"
(followed by refreshments in the Common Room, Department of Asian Languages and Literatures, 9 Symonds St.)

Mr. Mohamad will also deliver two papers to the Eleventh New Zealand International Conference on Asian Studies, Saturday-Sunday, 1-2 July 1995

"You insult me, you wantonly display your charm,
you belittle me,
you entice my women, you pollute my kingdom.
Answer me, Sukra."

The night was a wall, a wall
on which the shadows of javelins played.

"I know nothing of that, my Lord."

The moon floundered to earth
Before morning arrived

"Beat him, here!"

My God, scarlet lies
You wish to taste the bitterness of blood

"Put ants in his eyes!"

The whole of Kartasura said nothing

1979
(translated by John H. McGlynn)

AT THE FLEA MARKET

At the flea market footsteps drum on footsteps, erasing you and me, recalling you recalling me.

Life is an old carpet, my child, pumps, *bouraq* pictures, pictures of Jesus, dictionaries, nightgowns and floor-length drapes, where there used to be a house, where we do not reside, which we do not own, where perhaps a parakeet tried to sing, tried to sing, and someone shut a door, listen, Father, I won't be back, won't be back.

Memory is like the beads hawked by that harmonica player: discrete things, white and round, strung together but not linked, a montage, a stutter of morse code, Save Us, S.O.S., We're Drowning, an affair we hope will not come to haunt our nightly dreaming.

Parting is a sign of death, the old man selling mirrors speaks and wonders, who are we really, what are we doing.

1994
(translated by Tim Behrend)

ZAGREB

–for Xanana Gusmão

The woman comes, carrying a package, having travelled far from Zagreb.

The woman comes, carrying a package containing a severed head,
and to the immigration official who examined her says, "This is my boy."

Her voice is an open wound
on the veranda of the border control office.
People glance up
In the anxious light.

A clock on the table seems to indicate
that dusk, also dusk,
will be unable to leave them.

Then she approachs and shows
the contents of her package, and she says:

"Seven soldiers dragged him from a hospital bed,
seven soldiers took him to the edge of a wood and slit his throat,
seven enemies committed murder, a single head plopped and
rolled, stopping in the end, silent, only when its blood-spattered
mouth snagged on a bit of sand in the weedy interstices.

"That pain is now wrapped up here, in this leftover piece of shrouding.
He was just 21. Look at his face. My handsome boy."

Well-trimmed trees crowd around
like the ancient temple statues stored for so many
years in the palace square. The dark begins to hush,
moves toward uniformity,

and in the distance a city appears looking like phosphorescent calligraphy,
jots and strokes of fire at the horizon,
alphabetic signs,
vulgar words.

It feels as though nothing can free us.
The officer is motionless in his seat, dreaming of children, a certain one
recounting how the first strawberry fell on his shoulder.
They no longer exist, he whispers, no longer exist.

It is as if someone has called upon god, through the wind vent
in the left wall, into the howl of the rain, proclaiming the hour of death,
cursing the test, and the rustling sigh of it sounds like a muffled obeisance,
a sharp pang, a vestigial prayer.

What's there to do after this? The mother: she rebundles
the head brought from Zagreb and makes her way to the road.

No one offers to accompany her.
Out there, over the distant horizon, directions disappear, Venus disappears.
Stars may be just so many ruins, and east, wherever east might be,
is shattered.

But she may know the name of the next town.

1994

(translated by Tim Behrend)